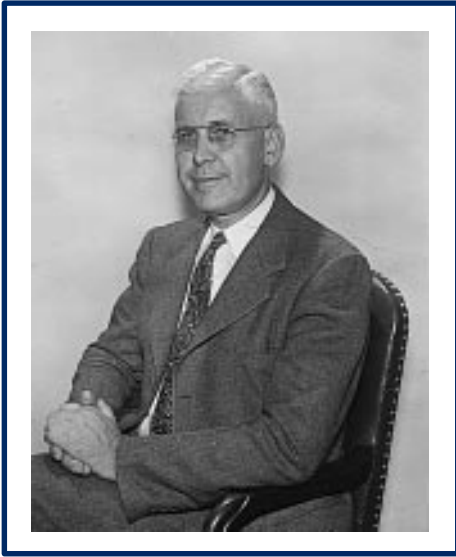


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ORAL HISTORY—

A. ROSS ECKLER



This is an interview conducted on April 11, 1984, with Dr. A. Ross Eckler, Deputy Director of the Census Bureau from 1949 to 1965, then Director from 1965 to 1969. The interviewer is Theodore G. Clemence, Senior Advisor, Bureau of the Census. Dr. Eckler's career in Government spanned 34 years, 30 of those with the Census Bureau beginning in 1939.

Clemence: Dr. Eckler, welcome, good morning.

Eckler: I hope we get some things down on the record that people in the future may find interesting to look at and to keep alive some of the happenings of the past.

Clemence: We appreciate your willingness to do this. We are really just getting started on this project, as you know, and we've interviewed only a few people. Everyone has consented generously to help on this project. I don't know whether we need to worry about the personality theory of history for this purpose, but it is certainly true that the Bureau has a long history of outstanding Directors and Deputy Directors and Associate Directors and other professionals who make quite significant contributions to the Bureau's work, traditions and so forth. So we felt it was very important to get some of their reflections on the record. I think we might note before we go back to the beginning in your case that you came to the Bureau in 1939 and became Deputy Director in 1949 and completed your career there as Director in 1969. During that time you were Deputy Director for 16 years.

Eckler: That's right. I believe I established the record for duration in the Deputy job. As a matter of fact, it was a fairly new job then. The only one that had been in it before me was Phil Hauser [Philip M. Hauser, Assistant Director, Deputy Director, then Director (1949-1950)], who was scarcely in it for even a day. It was a paper job as far as he was concerned. I came in and established a record of 16 years, and I've encouraged some of the younger Deputy Directors since then to break my record. But, I think it is only fair to say that you ought to count the years in multiples now,

because life is more difficult since I was in there. There are many more obstacles, many more problems, so that I think a Deputy Director ages faster than he used to.

Clemence: **I don't know. We will come to that period later on. Let's go back to the beginning. I think, primarily for purposes of this record, your education will be important to reflect on, but do you want to go back before Hamilton College and tell us anything about what got you started in the intellectual world and scientific world as a young man in upstate New York?**

Eckler: Well, I think that probably I ought to start with Hamilton College. I was always interested in mathematics and quite proficient in that, I guess. But, I never thought of going into the field of statistics, which was not too well formed at the time when I went through college. I was a graduate of Hamilton College in 1922. At that time, there were very few established courses in statistics, and it was not a discipline that attracted a great deal of attention.

Clemence: **Did you major in math?**

Eckler: Math was one of my majors. I had about three or four majors—Philosophy, English, Chemistry—so I spread my efforts quite widely.

Clemence: **Now, I've known you for 20 years, and I never knew until now that you studied philosophy.**

Eckler: That was a major in college, but after that I didn't take any formal training in that field. My graduate work, which came on a little later, was in the fields of economics and statistics. I suppose what started me in statistical work was a professor, who was at Williams College and then became president of Hamilton College, Frederick Carlos Ferry. He was a very inspiring teacher whom I had for a course in calculus. After I got through college, I went into teaching for a couple of years. As a matter of fact, I was a math teacher, and now math teachers are getting to be very scarce. It would have been a very good profession to have stayed in. I had the opportunity of going into statistical work with the Harvard Economic Society in Cambridge, Massachusetts. William Crum of that Society was from Williams College also. He had known Ferry there. They were trying to recruit people for this economic society in Cambridge, so he wrote Ferry, and Ferry suggested that I be a candidate for a position with the Harvard Economic Society. They were concerned with statistical work. The old ABC curves which were used for forecasting were developed by the Harvard Economic Society.

Clemence: Was this anything like the economic clubs of today?

Eckler: The economic clubs of today tend to be professional associations. This society was a business organization. They published a letter every week forecasting what's going to happen to business. Unfortunately, they didn't do a very good job on alerting people to the depression that came in 1929. So their subscription list dropped off very sharply. At the same time their payroll dropped off quite sharply, and I needed to find a different position around 1929 or 1930.

Clemence: So you really had the title you might say of statistician, all the way back there in Harvard days.

Eckler: I had the title of statistician there and worked on statistical operations much less sophisticated than are important today. I didn't get into survey work, for example, at all. During 1930, I had a chance to go to Harvard Business School, partly with the library and partly with the public utility economics staff, dealing with public utility problems, and so on, under Clyde Ruggles. I was there about 4 years. At that time the New Deal was getting to be quite active here in Washington, and some of my former associates with Harvard Economic Society had come down here, and they were working on some of the problems of the organization of Federal statistics in a well-known group called the Committee on Government Statistics and Information Services. They had on their staff some of my former colleagues. One of them was Henry Arthur, with whom I was closely associated at the Harvard Economic Society. At that time he had gotten to the Works Progress Administration, and he was Assistant Director of research there under Howard Myers. He suggested that I might want to come down to Washington and work for a year. Very good experience, he said you never get anything like it anywhere else. So in 1935, I came down for a year, and that stretched out pretty well. It was 34 years later before I decided to retire from the Census Bureau, so it was a long year.

Clemence: That's not too unusual to hear from people when you ask why, or how, they came into government, or how they came into the Bureau. They say, well they were just going to try something out for a while. I, myself, came down from Brown University at the suggestion of Sidney Goldstein. At the time, I was not sure what to do next, and he said that there was a census coming up so why don't you go down to the Census Bureau for a couple of years. I stretched that out a bit too. Let me go back just quickly once to Hamilton College. Did you bring your interest in math into college, or were there people or activities at Hamilton that kind of turned on your interests further?

Eckler: Well, I feel I brought it to the college all right, because I was quite interested in it in high school, and got all the training in mathematics that I could in my local high school. Then I was stimulated in college by having some contact with Ferry, who was a very exceptional teacher.

Clemence: So you really did not decide, when you came to the Works Progress Administration, you were not making a conscious decision about a long public career?

Eckler: No, I was thinking at the same time that we would go back to Cambridge. We had rented our house up there. I thought it was a temporary excursion in Washington to get some experience and go back.

Clemence: Did you think at that time you would probably go into teaching or research?

Eckler: I think I didn't like teaching that well. I would probably have thought that I would go into some kind of research rather than teaching.

Clemence: Well, that brings us up pretty quickly to the Works Progress Administration. That was about 4 or 5 years.

Eckler: I came there in 1935 and left there to go to the Census Bureau in 1939. During that time I had experienced a lot of things which were very useful to have as a basis for my later career. The first chance to get into survey work, organizing surveys, sampling, and writing reports on various problems of the unemployed and underemployed. It was the special inquiries section that was devoted to taking up various problems of relief and unemployment.

Clemence: Who was the administrator of the Works Progress Administration?

Eckler: The administrator was Harry Hopkins.

Clemence: **Did you ever see much of him, or was he on the go all the time?**

Eckler: He was a little too far away from me to have any contact. I met him once, but I had no real contact with Hopkins. About as high as I got was the administrator for research, Howard B. Myers, and he was under Corrington Gill. Corrington Gill spread his wing over the research group, Howard Myers' outfit, and a statistics group, which was headed by Emerson Ross. It was a place where there were a good many people who later became very important in the government. People like Conrad Taeuber [Assistant Director for Demographic Fields, then Associate Director for Demographic Fields], Phil Hauser, Howard Grieves [Assistant Director for Economic Fields (1947-1965), then Deputy Director (1965-1967)], and many others.

Clemence: **These were all at the Works Progress Administration?**

Eckler: Yes or from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration at some stage, and later they moved into key spots in the Government. So it was a training ground for people who later had a real impact on the statistical system of the Government.

Clemence: **Now I suppose the people in charge wanted good facts to decide what to do with the social problems.**

Eckler: Yes. There were various problems about the unemployed for which they needed to get quick information. So this special inquiries section that I headed was devoted to making forays into these unknown areas and to get quick information which would provide a basis for new policies of the Works Progress Administration.

Clemence: **Were there labor economists in that group that went on to the Bureau of Labor Statistics or the Department of Labor? I was thinking of Isador Lubin, was it about his time?**

Eckler: Isador Lubin was not in the Works Progress Administration as far as I know, but he was an active person, being somewhat later a presidential adviser. He was a very prominent influence. In 1933, he was Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Clemence: **Now this kind of activity was also strongly supported pretty far up? As I can recall, Frances Perkins, Secretary of Labor, was very concerned about labor statistics.**

Eckler: She was tremendously concerned about unemployment and the problems of the poor. One of the features of the Works Progress Administration was the development of the current unemployment survey. At that stage, we had no real measure of

the size of the unemployment load. There were estimates made by the indirect method of estimating the labor force and estimating the number of employed and then figuring the ones not employed were unemployed, and this was a very crude measure. All they knew was that there were many millions, in excess of 10 million, but to know month to month what was happening was not really accurately shown by any of these measures. So some of my colleagues in the Works Progress Administration seemed to have the idea earlier than anybody else that it would be possible to make a direct measure of this. I recall a conversation that John Webb, who was the chief of the economic side of this research division, had with Howard Myers, and he had a couple of people under him who were very bright young fellows, Les Frankel and Steven Stock, who had among them a concept of directly measuring the people who were looking for work, and having a sample survey to measure this.

Clemence: **Wasn't this before a lot of work had been done on applied sampling?**

Eckler: They were going to take a sample. They had a plan to take a sample of the population, quite sophisticated for that time. It was a probability sample, but not as elaborate a system as later developed in the Current Population Survey. Nevertheless, a very real advance.

Clemence: **Was this idea borrowed in any way from the earliest work of the agriculture groups that seemed to me were sampling plants, cows, and pigs?**

Eckler: I don't think it was borrowed from them. I think it was a different approach on a different problem. It reflected a similar desire to get direct measures of phenomena that were taking place. This labor force survey was established, I would think probably around 1937 or 1938, the first direct measurements, and this was going on a number of months. When the 1940 census came along, its results were matched up against the census, and there was a good deal of uncertainty as to how well it would measure up. There were some tremendous differences. Nevertheless, the labor force survey proved itself, and it was generally accepted as being in some ways superior to the measure from the census.

Clemence: **So the first survey was really a Works Progress Administration project?**

Eckler: It was indeed, yes, but with research funds.

Clemence: Do you recall how large the sample was?

Eckler: I don't recall. It was a household sample. It was a good deal smaller than the Current Population Survey of today, but it was a sizable group and there were great many field offices from which they obtained the information by direct contact with the population.

Clemence: We will want to talk a little more about the sampling development. Let's go back to the Works Progress Administration for a moment. You mentioned you were there about 4 years. Did the organization fold up or did you just find something else?

Eckler: There was a certain amount of serendipity that came into play at this point. The need for the organization gradually tapered off in the late 1930's or early 1940's. At the same time, there was a recruiting of people for the 1940 census. So it seemed logical for me to take advantage of that opportunity, and get a new kind of experience. Again, this was presented as an unusual chance to get statistical experience.

Clemence: You weren't ready to go back to Harvard or Cambridge.

Eckler: By that time I pretty well had given up the thought of going back there. I'm not sure I had sold our house in Belmont as yet, but we had pretty well decided that we were going to stay in the Washington area.

Clemence: I would like to go little more into the transition into Census. Before we do that, however, have we missed anything important about your time at the Works Progress Administration?

Eckler: I think we've hit the highlights. I do recall clearly a conversation that Howard Grieses and John Webb and Howard Myers had about the possibility of directly measuring the volume of unemployment in the country. They expressed a great deal of optimism that the direct measurement of that by interviewing people was possible. Howard Myers was a little skeptical at the outset, but he became convinced that this was a real possibility. I don't think you can emphasize too much the importance of that work which the Works Progress Administration had undertaken, which they needed for their own operation, and which later became the basis for the Current Population Survey which is the source of much of our current information today.

Clemence: How did they imagine they would have an accurate sample? Did they use the 1930 census data?

Eckler: I think they used the 1930 census data. They gave it as essentially a probability sample that had certain numbers of people to follow up on. It wasn't a strictly area

sample like the kind used later on. I believe it was a cluster sample. It was quite a good sample. I think that a lot of people later on were quite favorably disposed toward it.

Clemence: **Were they inclined to take the answers people gave them at face value? Did they allow for the fact that it might be difficult to get accuracy on some of these?**

Eckler: I doubt if they knew too much about those problems of response bias and so on. There was a problem that the job was done by the Works Progress Administration staff, making them more alert to Works Progress Administration unemployment and so forth. Census had not been very successful in identifying the Works Progress Administration employment, and the survey which was operated for the Works Progress Administration was more alert and more successful in identifying those people. So there were some very real differences between the Census Bureau's results and those of the Works Progress Administration. On the whole, however, this was construed as being favorable to the Works Progress Administration's operation. It was vindicated; however, much uncertainty there had been about it.

Clemence: **Now up until these facts came along in the late 1930's from this survey, were people convinced that there wasn't as much unemployment as there really was? Did figures show it higher?**

Eckler: I am sure that there was the usual mixture of opinions about that. The ones that were conservative probably thought there was an exaggeration in the estimate, and others thought the estimate failed to recognize the full size of the problem. So, I don't think there was any doubt that the same problems existed then as today.

Clemence: **So we were even then, as we are now, in the business of putting out the facts and having people argue about what they mean. Now, in 1939, I am going to ask about going to the Census Bureau, because I'm curious that you would have just gone over there as stranger to a bunch of strangers. Were there people in the Works Progress Administration doing this too, or were there people at the Census Bureau who wanted to have you?**

Eckler: At that time, Phil Hauser, who was one of my associates in the Works Progress Administration, had gone to the Census Bureau a little ahead. He was going to be the occupational expert, an understudy to Dr. [Alba M.] Edwards, who had been a long time worker in the field of occupation and industry classification, and Phil was to be his understudy. Phil worked very closely with Leon Truesdell [Leon E. Truesdell, Chief Statistician, Population Division], and identified people who might be helpful

to come in for the census period. They recruited under the rules which existed then and still exist. A great many people were brought in on census term appointments, and so people like Glen Taylor, Bob Voight, and a good many others were brought in, and I was one of those, with the influence of Phil Hauser, who decided to shift over to the Census Bureau to get the experience that comes only with the big census. This is a large-scale operation that is unique as an opportunity. I was very happy to have this chance, and I was to be the head of the employment and income section of the Bureau, as they needed some staff to handle that.

Clemence: **Was that in the Population Division?**

Eckler: Yes, it was one of the sections of the Population Division. I brought in Bill Mautz, who had been in the Works Progress Administration, and Richard Crawford, to be the income man. Under them, two extremely able people were recruited, one was John Durand on the employment/unemployment side.

Clemence: **Durand is a familiar name in Census history, isn't he?**

Eckler: Yes, indeed. I'm not sure if he was a grandson or nephew, but he was related to E. Dana Durand, who was a Director in 1912. It is a famous name, and the younger Durand was a very able citizen, a real joy to me to have someone with that skill in planning the tables for the 1940 census. On the income side I had an equally gifted person, a subordinate under Dick Crawford, and that was Selma Goldsmith. She later became a real power in the Washington area. So, we had a very good staff that came in. Planning the tables for the 1940 census was very well handled by them.

Clemence: **Now 5 years before that, say about 1934 or 1935, the Bureau would not have been a very promising place, or were there already a few good people starting to go there?**

Eckler: It was beginning to change in the latter half of the 1930's. There was a development which was very important. I think that was because Stuart Rice was there in the early 1930's. He was Assistant Director and with Vergil Reed [Vergil D. Reed, Assistant Director, then Acting Director (1940)], was beginning to bring in some people like Cal Dedrick [Calvert L. Dedrick, Chief, Statistical Research Division; later coordinator for International Statistics], Halbert Dunn on the vital statistics side with Forrest Linder, and there was quite a number of others that were brought in. They brought a breath of fresh air into the place.

Clemence: Did Morris Hansen [Morris H. Hansen, Assistant, then Associate Director for Statistical Standards and Methodology] come about that time or later?

Eckler: He came on around then. So, this was a much more attractive place to come to as a result of that new birth of life on the part of the Census Bureau in the last half of the 1930's.

Clemence: So the people who were not at the Bureau yet could see the Bureau becoming a more lively place. Then the 1940 census was a special opportunity to try out some of these ideas, to try out sampling and so forth.

Eckler: At that time Edwards Deming [W. Edwards Deming, sampling expert, Population Division] was brought in to work on the plans for the 1940 census sampling operation. Frederick Stephan [Secretary-Treasurer of the American Statistical Association] was a consultant we also had, to give advice on that. Hansen was very valuable on that and so were some others like Ben Tepping [Benjamin J. Tepping, principal researcher, Statistical Research Division] and Bill Hurwitz [William N. Hurwitz, Chief, Statistical Research Division].

Clemence: Now the Duncan-Shelton work on the revolution in statistics, which covers that period, and refers to one of the key developments in the period (we are talking about sampling) suggests that there was quite a difference of opinion both in the Bureau and around Washington about the merits of sampling in the census. Some people were really against it.

Eckler: There were certainly people in the Bureau that came up in the tradition of making complete counts. They thought of the census as being a place where you got full details, complete counts of the population and its characteristics. Dr. Truesdell was skeptical of the use of sampling, and some of the other older people had their doubts about this. They felt that this was going to downgrade the validity of census information, because you had to say that this is based on a sample, and the ones that are missed, and not included, might be quite different from the ones that you might have, and they didn't know enough about the problems of sample variation and so forth.

Clemence: It was something of a puzzle how they got this launched because nowadays people would say that you, no matter how good the idea was, if you did not convince the people at the top, you wouldn't get very far. If I remember correctly, Steuart [William Mott Steuart, Director 1921-1933, Bureau of the Census] was followed by William Austin who was Director until 1941 and quite an old liner in the Steuart pattern. Did he come around to sampling?

Eckler: I think he was brought around. I think Phil Hauser had quite a role there. He became a key person in the population field, and later he became the Assistant Director of the Bureau. He had a lot of influence. Phil, as you know, is quite a persuasive fellow. People like Deming and Fred Stephan, and others had their impact. Advisory committees were reviewing this thing and making their weight felt. So there was quite a lot of pressure, and Austin, fortunately, was able to adjust to this and to accept the new idea. Of course, when J.C. Capt came to the Census Bureau shortly after 1941, he was quite a supporter.

Clemence: Was there any important dimension of getting on with this as far as the Department of Commerce was concerned? I seem to remember the name of John Dickinson around those years being a pretty able Assistant Secretary of Commerce. Seems to me I read he was an economist and a lawyer, and might have encouraged the slower ones to accept something like this.

Eckler: I don't recall any impact from Dickinson. He might have had some. But, I think it was largely generated from the Census Bureau, itself, and people like Hauser and others had their influence and the advisers who worked with us. And undoubtedly the Bureau of the Budget was beginning to have some influence in that direction too, the statistical standards people.

Clemence: That was established about this same time—between the mid- to late 1930's, correct? Then, I guess, Stuart Rice went back over there and headed up that, so that probably helped too. There must have been some controversy budgeting through all of this and getting this through Congress. Did Congressmen go along pretty easily?

Eckler: I wasn't before the Congress at that time in hearings and so forth. There was an extensive evaluation of the proposals to get income information from the census. That was one that attracted a great deal of attention in the Congress and we had hearings on that. Congressman Pepper was very helpful in pointing out the importance of the information that would be gotten on income.

Clemence: **Claude Pepper?**

Eckler: Yes, and there were some people, notably, Mr. Tobey from New Hampshire, who was vehement about invading the privacy of citizens to ask about their income. It was a very tough question for the Congress. For a time it looked as if they might react against it and make it impossible to include that. Finally, however, there was an agreement that it was possible to have a separate form for people who didn't want to report to the enumerator, and they could mail something in. There were a large number of those forms printed, but a relatively small number were used. So that it attracted less controversy when it actually got in the field than was generated in the congressional discussion. That was an important controversy. The matter of sampling was reasonably well accepted by the Congress as far as I can recall.

Clemence: **So, the 1940 census was, am I correct, the first time for the income questions, and the first time for sampling to get a lot of the information?**

Eckler: Yes.

Clemence: **Was some of the persuading at that time done by people like Hauser and others giving talks, making speeches? I am wondering about the communications side of this because nowadays I would guess that if a Director were even just downtown giving a talk it would be in the newspapers. People would be thinking about the issue and making up their minds. How public did these kinds of issues get at the time?**

Eckler: I don't think there was great public attention given to it at the time. Hauser undoubtedly got into speeches and so forth, but I don't believe that the Director was involved in that. It didn't attract that much public attention at that time as far as I can recall. The income controversy and the measurement of employment and unemployment was a more lively subject.

Clemence: **On sampling you are saying that although Austin was Director he was willing to recognize the good ideas and good talent and let them go ahead.**

Eckler: I think he was, and the Research Division that was headed by Cal Dedrick at that time was feeding in information on the importance of sampling and the desirability of getting information on subjects that you couldn't afford to collect on a 100-percent basis. There was quite a barrage of support for it from different directions. So the Director, even if he had some skepticism, was more or less pushed into acceptance of this. The resistance to this was more from the old timers. They weren't

as vocal or effective. They expressed skepticism, but they didn't make a campaign of it.

Clemence: **Would that be true of William Steuart, who I imagine was still...**

Eckler: He was pretty inactive as far as I recall. I don't recall any reaction from him.

Clemence: **I think we noticed from earlier research that he lived quite a long life after he was Director, until 95. You don't think he was consulted much after he was retired.**

Eckler: Not very much at all. Occasionally he would be around the Bureau, and I would see him. I had little direct contact with him, but I don't recall any impact from him or any advice, or point of view that he expressed. I am sure he was shocked at some of the developments that took place.

Clemence: **Let's get back to you when in 1939 you entered the Population Division. What were actually your major assignments during your first few years at the Bureau?**

Eckler: Well, I guess for the first two or three years my major assignments were the planning of tabulations from the 1940 census. This was an opportunity for a very substantial body of tables, decisions as to what the form and content would be, what areas the data would be published for, what would be done on a sample basis first, what would come along later on a 100-percent basis.

Clemence: **This was probably a very critical time in terms of which areas to show sample information. How was that actually decided? You already had census tracts, right?**

Eckler: We had census tracts, yes.

Clemence: **Did we show sample data for tracts that early?**

Eckler: I don't think we did, but I would have to look back and see for sure. I don't recall the specifics on that.

Clemence: **How about block statistics?**

Eckler: I don't think they were active then.

Clemence: **Was there any conscious design of the thresholds below which you should not go for the samples? In other words, you might do it for counties but not for small places.**

Eckler: I am sure that was the case. I don't recall the specific limits there, but we got as much as we felt we could on the data, and later on we got more precise ideas of sampling variations, response bias, and so on.

Clemence: Was the scope of the sample somewhat more modest than it is now? There was still quite a lot of 100-percent information?

Eckler: Yes, but we didn't have varying sampling rates. The Bureau only had a 5-percent sample.

Clemence: That probably wasn't...

Eckler: Probably not enough for tracts. Then around 1943 a very important development took place. The Works Progress Administration was beginning to taper off their activities. There seemed to be a question as to whether the labor force survey could be continued. The Budget Bureau's Office of Statistical Standards, began looking at the question of where that activity ought to be transferred in the government. I think a number of us recognized that this was potentially an extremely important development. Whoever got that would have a great deal of opportunity to participate in programs of the government in future years. I remember talking to J.C. Capt, who was then the Director; I said you ought to make efforts to have this transferred to the Census Bureau. He didn't go into any detail, but he said he had set out some buckets and with that he meant that he had tried to make some provisions for having it drop our way. He was a pretty shrewd political manipulator so he had done more than he told us about. But, the Bureau of Labor Statistics was interested in that, and it was a natural thing because it did measure employment and unemployment. I believe there was some interest in having it somewhere in Health, Education and Welfare. But at any rate, Stuart Rice, who I think had the concept of having the Census Bureau develop to be a general purpose kind of agency, felt that it ought to come to the Bureau. I think his influence was decisive.

Clemence: I see. Now it sounded earlier as though practically everyone who was any good at the Works Progress Administration went to the Census Bureau. Was there anyone left behind that would help steer this in one direction or the other by the early 1940's? Anybody who was in the Works Progress Administration on the statistical end?

Eckler: Well, Howard Myers was there, and he was a strong influence.

Clemence: So, a fair number of people were willing to say the Bureau would be the best place.

Eckler: Probably some of them were inclined to favor the Bureau of Labor Statistics, too. So, I don't think it was by any means unanimous.

Clemence: Right. From what you say, however, about J. C. Capt, we may know he was an influence, but we may never know just how much.

Eckler: I don't know how he did it, but the decision was made for the Census Bureau.

Clemence: I should have asked you earlier, Dr. Eckler, if you knew J. C. Capt at the Works Progress Administration?

Eckler: Yes, I had contact. I wasn't terribly close to him, but I had a number of contacts.

Clemence: He was in the information public affairs part?

Eckler: No, he was the executive officer. His office wasn't too far away from mine in the Walker-Johnson Building.

Clemence: I see. Now, I believe I read that J.C. Capt came to the Census Bureau just a little before 1940 to help on the recruiting on the census. Then, in fact, became Austin's successor as Director in 1941. How does this happen when he had no great training or background in statistics or economics?

Eckler: Well, there is no question that there was a certain amount of controversy in the Bureau about it. Vergil Reed, I think, expected to be named as the successor to Austin. There were undoubtedly political pressures and influences at work, and for some reason or other, J. C. Capt became identified as the person who would be well-equipped to take over. His experience with the recruiting for the 1940 census undoubtedly familiarized him with some of the problems and gave him some useful allies to support his claim. Just how he engineered this, what kinds of pressures he brought to bear, I don't know.

Clemence: Do you think that Harry Hopkins had anything to do with this? He wasn't a well man at that point, but I believe he was Secretary of Commerce for a while.

Eckler: He might have had an influence. J. C. Capt was a businessman, and this was a big organization, and I think they felt that he would make a very good leader, and he was an extremely good appointment.

Clemence: So you would say that J.C. Capt was pretty well accepted within the Bureau despite the lack of training, or was he controversial for a while?

Eckler: He became accepted after a while. At the beginning there were a good many people that had questions about him. They had a feeling that he was primarily a political figure. He had no experience with the census before, except for the

recruiting in 1940. So there were a lot of misgivings. Many of the old Bureau hands would have felt more comfortable with Vergil Reed.

Clemence: **How did J.C. Capt turn this around? Did he just let it take its course?**

Eckler: He let it take its course pretty much. He didn't engage in any strong public relations approach, but people began to see that he knew what he was talking about. He made good decisions and was well received. Phil Hauser became assistant under him, and he was extremely skillful, a well-organized man.

Clemence: **I guess native intelligence goes a long way.**

Eckler: And business experience that he had was useful and with his Works Progress Administration's experience he knew quite a few people in the Government.

Clemence: **Was J.C. Capt good about delegating the technical side?**

Eckler: Extremely good. He was able to see that there was undoubtedly something to the argument of these professionals and he listened to them and gave them support. So that was a very happy arrangement. He wasn't a pushover by any means, but he was very intelligent and willing to take some chances. Well, after the Works Progress Administration operation was brought over to the Census Bureau, it was about the time when my original appointment was coming to an end, and it was decided that they would set up a new division—Special Surveys Division—and put this Works Progress Administration operation in that division. We made that a central place for service work for other agencies.

Clemence: **This was outside the Population Division?**

Eckler: Yes.

Clemence: **It was the origin of the Demographic Surveys Division, basically. This was about 1943 or 1944.**

Eckler: Yes, 1943 I think it was. I was chief of that division. The old Works Progress Administration group came in, and we had some others that were specialists on survey work and so forth. So we did a lot of work for the Office of Price Administration and the War Production Board, and so on.

Clemence: **I seem to have read somewhere that around this time you had the title of social science analyst. I always wondered why, with your economics, that you would have been classified that way. Is there a tale hanging there?**

Eckler: Well, after the Special Surveys Division went on for several years, I had a chance to take a little broader job, one which would involve responsibility for several

divisions, and that was the social science analyst job. Then later, that was called the Assistant Director for demographic fields; later on, I was the Deputy Director. These were all broadening my scope of operation. Social science analyst and the Assistant Director were quite similar jobs. They involved the demographic side of the Bureau. It's true that I was formally an economist, and there would have been some logic in my being on the other side. Howard Grievess was coming in at the same time, and he was a strong economist with a lot of experience on this side. So it seemed desirable to make him the man on the economic side, and he was the Assistant Director for Economic Fields. I became the Assistant Director for Demographic Fields. The social science analyst was a forerunner of that.

Clemence: **So the management group would have been by this time, you, Hauser, Grievess, and of course the Director, and on the research side was this Morris Hansen with Cal Dedrick?**

Eckler: Cal Dedrick at that time, Hansen a bit later. It was a very able group and very nice to work with and as a team it worked very well.

Clemence: **What about the period when you were working on special surveys, does anything stand out in, say, from 1945 to 1949, as far as unusual developments and innovations that you were directly involved in?**

Eckler: During all this period the evolving improvement in sampling techniques, organization of operations was going on. So there was a lot of that. As far as surveys were concerned, we were engaged in breaking into new areas all the time. So the service side of the Bureau was growing more rapidly than anything else.

Clemence: **You mean work for other agencies.**

Eckler: Yes, work for other agencies became very important. I think I would like to emphasize the fact that the period of the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's happens to be the period when I was most active in the Census Bureau; I'm not trying to imply, however, that I was responsible for this, but I think of those as being the golden years of the Bureau. The opportunities were tremendous. The expansion in so many directions was going on that it makes a very important story. Why were those the golden years? I guess likely that you like to think of the things that you knew about and participated in as being the most important, but I think other people have come to the same conclusions about that. I think one of the important features was that all through this time there was a cohesive spirit, cooperation, and understanding; we were all working together as a team trying to find better ways of measuring facts about population and institutions. The group of people under Morris Hansen were

truly prodigious in their efforts to improve our techniques, our organization, our scientific approach. They worked extremely long hours and were completely devoted to the Bureau, and they were willing to adopt new ideas and press for those, and if those didn't work, shift to others and so forth. It was a period of great excitement and achievement on their part. And people like Hansen, Bershad, Hurwitz, Tepping, Waksberg and many others can't be praised too highly for what they accomplished in that period. That, I think is one of the most important reasons why this can be thought of as the golden period for the Bureau. Why did it take place in the 1940's, why did it get going? I think as I mentioned earlier, the seedcorn for that was dropped in the latter part of the 1930's when people came into the Bureau like Hauser, Hansen, Dunn, Linder, Rice, a little bit earlier than that, and a number of others. This brought a rejuvenation to the Bureau...I think if the Bureau in 1939 had been the same Bureau that was operating in 1932, many of us would not have been attracted to it. It was a very stolid uninspiring place, with hardly any professional people. If you listed people like Truesdell, Hill, and Edwards, it would have been pretty much the whole list of people with professional experience and understanding. Later on it expanded, so when the 1940's came along, you had a real ferment on the professional side, in one field after another. So that was an important development which makes this a golden era, the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's.

Clemence: **Would you say that would have happened about on schedule if there had been no central statistical board, no Stuart Rice, or was that a very important positive force?**

Eckler: I don't think they gave a whole lot of push toward it. They certainly did something when they steered the Works Progress Administration survey over to the Census Bureau. That was a very important push, along with their influence, of course, on the agencies that wanted to have work done. If we hadn't been there and invited them, they might have set up their organization each time when they wanted to get facts about education, housing, or a large number of areas of inquiry. They would have set up their own organization. It would have been a much more expensive job, I fear, and probably not as good a job as we could have done with our experienced staff. Therefore, the Bureau of the Budget [which became the Office of Management and Budget in the 1970's] did give encouragement, but I don't know if you could say that they had the concept of pushing this kind of development. Stuart Rice did, but it seemed to me somehow that we had to do our own pushing a good deal of the time.

Clemence: **Almost seems as though Rice might have wanted to become Director by the early 1940's. Do you know if he was interested?**

Eckler: I never heard of his being interested in that way. I expect he probably saw in the Office of Statistical Standards the chance for a wider scope of operation, and one probably more agreeable to him than the organizational problems facing the Director of the Census. I doubt if he was regarding himself as an active candidate for that. As I was trying to indicate why I thought of the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's as the golden years, I mentioned the personnel changes, and I mentioned something about sampling and that kind of work. There was also a great deal of development in technology. You had a long time when the census depended primarily on the old punch-card equipment, that was the only equipment to handle that. In the 1940 census they had use of an improved form of the unit counter, which was a significant advance, but nevertheless was based on punch cards. Along in the late 1940's, the electronic equipment, the tape and so forth, became an approach which was the first machine to do the sort of work we had to do, not scientific measurement and calculation, but large-scale tabulation of data. The machine that we had developed and got turned over to us, just before the 1950 census, was a forerunner of vast changes in the technology of tabulation in the Bureau. I recall one story of Dr. Truesdell (I don't mean this to be invidious about Dr. Truesdell, because he was a great man, and was always very enthusiastic about the census) but he had a mischievous way of casting doubts on some of these new developments. We were going to have the new machine delivered to the Census Bureau just in time for the last tabulations of 1950, and Dr. Truesdell inquired as to how this was going to be brought down. Well, I guessed it was going to be brought down partly by ship, and put on a boat for a time. He said wouldn't it be possible and desirable for that to fall off while it was being loaded and dropped into the river? This was his idea of the undesirability of shifting over to this electronic equipment. He was very skeptical about it. Later on this commended itself to him as well as other people. I think at that time there were a lot of people who had skepticism about the new machines. These made possible revolutionary changes in the processing. Later on, Film Optical Sensing Device for Input to Computers (FOSDIC) came along to make it possible to proceed directly from the information recorded.

Clemence: Well, we are about up to where the young man from Harvard who thought he might go back becomes Deputy Director. We are about in the middle of the golden years.

Eckler: If I might, I'd like to continue the theme of the golden years. Why it was that we were able to accomplish so much in that period of time. I mentioned the tremendous work of the staff on research and development and perhaps one feature of their emphasis I could bring out. They began to evaluate the quality and completeness of censuses as early as 1945, after the census of agriculture. This was hailed with some uncertainty by a few people. They felt that the census would lose by finding out anything about errors that it commits. They were content to rest on the assumption that the census reports are complete and, therefore, perfect. The more enlightened view, to which most of us subscribed, was that if you could be honest and forthright about the defects in your data, you make them more usable for the public, and you get credit in the long run. That was one of the wisest decisions that we ever made. Evaluation of census work was a regular feature from 1945 on.

Clemence: Was there any one or two people at that point that pushed that concept the most?

Eckler: Well, certainly it would be Hansen and Hurwitz, but they worked as a team. They would work much of the night and sometimes in their homes, and they would come up with a point of view, and they were together on it. They were almost always right. You could quite safely agree with them. It always made sense. So this was an important feature. But that was a part of their continuing effort to find better ways of doing all kinds of statistical work, the whole matter of sampling, processing work and results. Later on, the development of computers and so forth stemmed to a great degree from the efforts of this devoted group, which I can't emphasize enough. Well, that may be enough for this side of the work. Another feature of that period, I think, was that we had a continuing, almost uniform good relationship, with the Commerce Department, with one notable exception that I'll mention. In the main, Commerce Department looked upon the Bureau as an important part of the organization, and they attempted to find out what they could do to be of help and cooperate with us. One exception to this point of view was during the period when Mr. Sinclair Weeks came in 1953. Mr. Weeks should have known better, as he was an industrial man who had been in charge of a big silver company, Reed and Barton. He should have known something of the value of statistics. Must be that he never had any occasion personally to use it. When he came in and found, in 1953, the law called for a census of manufacturing and business, he raised the

question as to whether that was necessary. When he was told that the law called for this, he said, well we'll leave it for the Congress to decide. So when he went up to appear before the Congress and the Appropriations Committee, he left it to them. The invitation to drop it out was overpowering. So that was a casualty. He used what we thought was bad judgment to refer to the Census Bureau as being infected by poison oak and wormwood. This didn't appeal to us very much as a description. Also, it didn't appeal to some of the users of business statistics, and they regarded this threat to the economic censuses as a very serious one. Bob Burgess [Robert W. Burgess, Director (1953-1961)] was our Director at that time. He had quite a lot of contact with the business side of things, and he made representations to the Secretary of Commerce that we should have a study made of this by the business group and an intensive review committee examination. So the Secretary concurred with this and set up a committee, and a very good committee. We had something to do with that, I am sure, for Bob Burgess suggested some of the men on it. The chairman was one extraordinarily able fellow named Ralph Watkins. They came out with a very strong conclusion that these censuses should be carried out and that they were needed. So the Secretary went ahead and made a request for that money a year later than usual, so the censuses got postponed. This also was the occasion for setting up an organization, which again was one of the reasons why the years of the 1940's, 1950's, and 1960's were so fine. The Federal Statistics Users Conference started out as a tripartite organization with representatives of business, labor, and research, and later, the State and local governments came in, and education also, I think. This organization lasted for many years and appeared very often before appropriations committees and before legislative committees to stress the importance of the census program and ask for cooperation. There is no doubt that the effective public attitudes towards the censuses were greatly changed by this organization, and the Congress was affected a good deal. So this was an important feature of our good luck in these years that I have been talking about. Well, to turn to another area, the Bureau of the Budget and the Office of Statistical Standards during this period exercised a powerful and beneficent influence on the Bureau of the Census. I think they were clearly responsible in some measure, and maybe in large measure, for the decision to allocate the monthly report on the labor force from Works Progress Administration to the Census Bureau. There were a number of other features, which were carrying out the objective of having the Census Bureau become an increasingly effective medium for service to other agencies. This I would note is one of the ways in which a decentralized system, such as we have in this country, can

achieve some of the benefits of a centralized system because the large-scale statistical programs can be handled by a service organization like the Bureau of the Census. You got the advantages of organization and continuity and so on, without having the work scattered around throughout the government.

Clemence: **If we could back up for just a second there. That idea about service I believe I saw in the recommendations of the Hoover Commission. Now is that because Hoover himself was big on statistics or was there somebody in the Commission who pushed this idea?**

Eckler: I'm glad you mentioned that, because I was going to talk about it at some stage. Mr. Hoover, I think, was favorably disposed towards this. He was Secretary of Commerce in the 1920's, and I think could well have been steered to strengthen the role of the Census Bureau if it had had a chief who was pushing for this. At that time, it was Mr. Steuart, who was an old timer. I don't think he had the concept of developing a service organization, so I think we lost an opportunity under Mr. Hoover. That would have been a golden time for the Bureau to have expanded its role. But at the time when the Hoover Commission was set up, there was a detailed examination of this question made by two men, Clarence Long and Fred Mills. The Mills-Long Report went into this matter rather intensively. These men concluded on the basis, I think, of efficient management that there was something to be said for having large-scale organizations, large-scale surveys handled by a central organization like the Bureau of the Census. That would not be contrary to the view of the COGSIS, which set up focal points for different kinds of statistical activity—labor would be focused in the Department of Labor and housing in the housing agency, and so on. But having the collection of statistical information handled by a service organization would be one way of achieving efficiency, better organization, and experience. At the same time, the agency sponsoring the program could control what was gotten and how it was used. I think that was the spirit in which the Mills-Long couple in the Hoover Commission wrote their report, which was one of the important features the Census Bureau quoted for quite a long time and probably still does. As this continued, this service work has gone on pretty much right through the years, and the service function has gotten to be a very large fraction of the total. I think that was developing through the late 1940's through the 1970's; so, that is an important feature.

Clemence: Is there anything about the general political climate that you would associate with all these positive developments. We are talking about a period where you had the Roosevelt and Truman period, but then you had Eisenhower, and then went back to the Democratic party with Kennedy and Johnson. So, would you say this was really a bipartisan thing and not the result of the policies of any particular administration?

Eckler: I think the Bureau was essentially a nonpartisan organization through much of this period, and was supported as being necessary regardless of the political powers that were in place at a given time. It is true that there were periods with particular secretaries where you would get a little more interest or a little less interest in this. But on the whole, somewhere beginning in the 1960's, they set up an Assistant Secretary for Economic Affairs, who was responsible for the Census Bureau. That was recognizing that the Bureau had an important role in economic statistics, but it didn't particularly emphasize the social side. However, the long-standing legislation for the decennial census pretty adequately covered that, and when the decennial census came along, there was general recognition of the fact that this was a major thrust of the Bureau and that money to carry out research and study the methods, and so forth, was needed and very important.

Clemence: One more item on the casualty list, during Weeks as Secretary of Commerce. There was also at that time, I understand, a very significant reduction in force at the Bureau partly because of the budget and partly because of it being after the census. You were there in 1953, and the people who remember it still remember it with quite a bit of pain; it was quite a devastating loss of talent.

Eckler: It was a very devastating cut that we suffered. It took place at the time when the Republicans gained control of the legislature, and we had a verb that we used at the time—"Taberizing" was the word. Everybody knew what the verb Taberize meant, it meant to severely reduce an appropriation. Taber of New York was the chairman of the appropriations committee at that time, and he was one tough character on statistical work. The result of that was that the Census Bureau lost a great many of its middle management people. We felt the lack of that group for a number of years; I am sure that we are past that now, but it was a very serious blow.

Clemence: Some of those people went to other agencies, I suppose.

Eckler: Yes, some of them went to other agencies and some went to private business. There wasn't too much opportunity at other agencies, because this was a sweep that went

across the board. But there were some that shifted over to other agencies. That was a serious thing. But on the whole, I mention this golden period that I talk about. During this entire period, the relationships with Congress were very good, and at times extremely good, with the exception of this “Taberizing period” where there was a really devastating situation. The congressional committees, however, were studying the Bureau’s problems, such as the need to have a quinquennial census, and plans for the 1960 and 1970 decennial censuses. There was a good deal of sympathy and interest in those programs and a desire to be helpful. They were not trying to snipe at us. Occasionally, they would make snide remarks about the fact that they hadn’t been consulted on some point. They were rather jealous about knowing about things in advance, but they weren’t trying to interfere. They were trying to take account of the various problems that they saw. As a matter of fact, there were some rather sweeping changes. Part of this development that I mentioned before, the research and development operation led to some rather sweeping changes in census methods. The beginning of self-enumeration was very actively undertaken in the 1960 census, and the officials of the Department and the officials in the committees were a little skeptical about our ability to get this information on a form filled out by the people themselves. They quizzed us very extensively, but nevertheless, they finally supported our plans. We were able to present that in a form that commended itself, so that we got funds for experimenting and funds for carrying it out.

Clemence: **When was the year that John Rooney was appropriations chair? Did he have quite an influence on the Bureau?**

Eckler: He had a tremendous influence on the Bureau. He was the chairman of the committee before 1950, at the time when we were first getting funds for UNIVAC [Universal Automatic Computer]. I recall very well that Morris Hansen, a very persuasive fellow, as you know, testified on the appropriations hearings, and he would present the case for going ahead with funds. We had some funds left over from developmental work on the agriculture census, and we had to get permission to use those for this new equipment. Well, John Rooney didn’t understand what this was about; nevertheless, he was willing to have faith in the Bureau that this was worth doing, so he supported it. We had funds that we allocated to the Bureau of Standards to do research on this. Then every year, since Mr. Rooney felt he had stuck his neck out a bit by approving this, he would quiz us on it. He had a great memory, or else his staff had a good tickler file, and he would say, how about the

computer. In the second and third year he would raise the question about this. One of the things you know about computers is that they always come through a lot more slowly than you expect. Therefore, Mr. Hansen would explain to Mr. Rooney that the outlook was very good, we had gotten so and so, and we had made this contract and so on. Well, Mr. Rooney would listen to that, and that went on for a couple of years. Finally, he felt the need to press us a little harder, so Mr. Hansen would give the usual explanation that this was coming along fine and everything was very promising and he said, "Mr. chairman I think that you will be very proud to have been a party to approving funds for this development." Mr. Rooney responded, "I would be a lot more proud if you would tell me that this was beginning to save money, and that you were going to such-and-such a reduction in cost as a result of this." But nevertheless, he continued to give us support, and I think he derived pride in later years from the fact that he had done this.

Clemence: **Is it fair to say, in fact, that we often broadcast how much this development would save, and never really saved very much anyway?**

Eckler: Well, we finally did save a great deal. It was an enormously productive thing. It was quite a long time before you realized that, so you had a lot of lean years to explain before you get to the payoff on it, and the bottom line began to get very favorable. The same is true of some things like the microfilming, FOSDIC, and so forth. Eventually, it came off to be very profitable. You have to have a lot of explaining first. So that was part of the problem, getting cooperation from the Congress. Actually, we were very successful with Mr. Rooney. He showed a willingness to stick his neck out and on occasion, he would seem to be very gruff. Of course, this is all on the record, so he had to have a record to show he had been tough. I recall one occasion he grilling us, and I can't recall the exact occasion, but it might have been in connection with the Congressman Jackson E. Betts controversy which I will mention later. He was clearly trying to give me a way out to explain something. Finally, he said, "Well, Mr. Eckler, I've given you an opening big enough to drive a great big truck through, and you won't go through it." I wasn't ready to take advantage of his way out of this thing, but he was clearly trying to be helpful. I think our success with Mr. Rooney was partly personal. I think we had enough contacts with him and enough record of being forthright, never trying to take him in or to be deceiving. If there was something unfavorable that we ought to report, we did it. I think he became convinced that we would give him the real information. Furthermore, we had a policy which may have been overdone. We had a policy of being

quite modest in our requests for increases. Howard Grieves, in particular, felt that that was something pretty important with John Rooney, not to have extravagant requests, and we agreed with it. On the basis of success later on in getting some enormous increases, maybe we could have done more; but at any rate, we did very well.

Clemence: **Now who were they, what kinds of people were on the legislative oversight side in those years, what kind of interests?**

Eckler: One of the most important people, I suppose, was Mr. Green, at the time when the mid-decade census question came on the floor. William Green was a Philadelphia Congressman, and a very able, personable individual. I'm unable to think of the name of anyone else right now.

Clemence: **I've come across a couple of names, let me mention, to see if they trigger anything unusual. It seems to me that Arnold Olson from Montana chaired the subcommittee at one time.**

Eckler: Yes. I felt that Arnold Olsen was a good friend of the Bureau. He didn't get very deeply into the issues, but he would give it a quick brush over and was a very helpful man. Cornelius E. Gallagher was on the subcommittee at one time, the New Jersey Congressman. Gallagher had a very positive point of view about disclosing information about individuals. We felt later that maybe the publicity that came out about his affiliation with gangsters in New Jersey or Philadelphia or somewhere might have made him very suspicious about anything which might embarrass him. Whether that's fair or not, I don't know. At the time, he was one who took issue with Mr. Betts on the controversy over mandatory reporting.

Clemence: **I also recall that, I think, Congressman Mo Udall was, at least for a short time, in charge of that committee. I don't know what period that was; however, I have a vague memory that people like Olsen and Udall and even up through Charlie Wilson were pretty supportive of the Bureau, even if they were not attentive to details.**

Eckler: I would like to mention Wilson; I'll mention him later perhaps. I would like to note particularly that Wilson was one of the best friends we had. He took on the Betts controversy, and conducted a series of hearings out on the west coast. He finally sponsored a resolution which took the heart out of the Betts position and got it approved. The Bureau wasn't crazy about his legislation, but it was probably a good solution.

Clemence: Now, Betts was going to take away mandatory power for all but about five questions for reasons of invasion of privacy. Yes, we have pretty good record on that. Our own history staff went back and traced that whole argument so that we could have it on the record. Well, going back to your own service, we've wandered ahead considerably from 1949; however, in any case, after that you were the Deputy Director, and really the first to fill a position of that title.

Eckler: The first to fill it, technically, was Phil Hauser. The reason that Phil was put in it was so that I could be made Assistant Director for demographic fields. Phil had been in that job. By creating a different job for Phil, they could put Howard Griev-
ees in economics and put me in the demographic side. So Phil never actually served as a Deputy Director.

Clemence: He left the Bureau about 1950?

Eckler: He was brought back in for a slight period there after J.C. Capt died.

Clemence: I see, 1949 and 1950.

Eckler: Until Roy Victor Peel [Director of the Census Bureau from 1950 to 1953] came in. We were all hoping very much that Phil would make it, that he would be designated as Director. There were some powers at work underneath there that he couldn't quite cope with, apparently.

Clemence: But in any event, from about that time forward you were really the number two man under the Director. This meant that you were now worrying about budgets and grade levels and talent, as well as surveys and censuses.

Eckler: Yes, a whole range of administrative and technical matters.

Clemence: Now, when did these administrative functions develop into a group of activities in their own right to be supervised? I'm trying to remember when the idea of an Assistant Director for administration was started. Was that something that the Bureau always had, or did that come after?

Eckler: Yes, the equivalent of that. I'm not sure when we called it an Assistant Director for administration as such, but the functions certainly go a way back.

Clemence: Now, you had mentioned that one of the characteristics of a good part of this period was not only a great deal of dedication on the part of the staff but also actual teamwork. Some of the people in the Bureau that don't go back that far have this story that goes around that Howard Grieves and Morris Hansen didn't really get on too well together, and some long-standing conflict there was an exception to your teamwork rule.

Eckler: That was something that developed very late in this period. They were as friendly and cooperative and had as much teamwork as anybody could imagine. Howard was ready to support Morrie, and Morrie was supporting Howard. Up until 1967, possibly, was when it began to break, and then at some stage, Morris and Howard became alienated somewhat from each other. I think that Howard felt that Morris was proposing some things he wasn't ready to support, he felt that he was being undermined a little bit, and Morris on the other hand felt a need for pushing ahead in certain programs. This was puzzling to me, how to handle the conflict, because they were both such key figures in the staff function that it was almost inconceivable to have them at swords' points. I didn't feel it was possible to throw them both out. There was something to be said for both sides; so I didn't see it possible to discipline one or the other. These are strong-minded people. They are not pushovers that you could just wind around your little finger. They had strongly held points of view, and each had staffs behind them that had the same point of view. So, it went along as a kind of armed truce between them for quite a little while. I think that the fact is that probably, in any case, they might have retired fairly soon, but it certainly hastened the retirements. Morris left to join Westat, and I don't think he would have gone that soon. Howard might have retired anyway, because he was getting to like Florida very much, as well as North Carolina, and might very well have decided to leave.

Clemence: So they were different in style, but this was really more intellectual and substantive differences in views about how to do things and not really personal.

Eckler: Not a personal thing at all. One of the reasons why I place so much emphasis on what I call the golden years, was that this was a period in which the use of statistics was growing very sharply in this country, the use of the various measures supplied by the Census Bureau. The Federal Statistics Users Conference was explaining the understanding of our sort of work, and I think we had a very happy period because the climate was almost uniformly good. Everyone accepted the fact that you had a

need for statistical information, and we hadn't yet gotten to the point where the emphasis on precise coverage was so great as it became later. The use of the population count for allocation of various resources had not gone to the point that it reached later. So we didn't have the extensive lawsuits about fighting over every last unit of count. We had a very favorable climate; however, it was not an excessively active climate in which lawsuits proliferated.

Clemence: Yes, that is an important difference.

Eckler: That is another reason why I think I was lucky to be at the Bureau at the time that I was. Today it is a quite different kind of problem that the Director faces at the time of the decennial census.

Clemence: I would guess probably it was in the 1960's when there was the greatest growth of federal programs that used our data and various formulas.

Eckler: I should think it was probably not too much before that, very much in the 1960's. Well, I think I've probably overemphasized what I call the golden years so that it sounds like a continuing, recurring theme. So, if I have, I'm sorry.

Clemence: Well, I think a lot of observers of the Bureau would support that thesis. Like many other things in our history, it seems to be sometimes a set of people and circumstances that are quite unique really. I would like to turn now briefly, if we could, back to the point about your having such a long career at the Bureau, not only there a long time, not only Director, but working as Deputy Director under at least three Directors and then having some acquaintance with the Directors that came after that. Your reflections on their comings and goings and style would be useful to have. Let me lead into this with something of a trap question. It is well known, of course, that we refer to the position of Director as a political appointee, and it is not unusual for the Director to leave and a new Director to come when there is a change in Administration. So, we are talking really for your period as Deputy Director, the end of the Roosevelt-Truman era, then the Eisenhower era, and then the Kennedy-Johnson era. I think we referred to the fact that J. C. Capt had no particular special training in statistics and maybe in political terms the Bureau was lucky to have gotten a good man anyway with the political process. Then I think it is pretty well accepted that Roy Peel was basically a political choice, Burgess perhaps not in the same sense, undoubtedly a good business Republican. Then Mr. Scammon [Richard Montgomery Scammon, Director

1961-1965, Bureau of the Census] certainly was perceived as a very politically astute adviser to the Kennedy Administration, if not a partisan politician. So, can you reflect on the almost random way these people came, and why they contributed to the golden years? Start with Peel, I suppose.

Eckler: I did not know Peel before he came to the Bureau, and I think probably hardly anybody in the Bureau had ever had any contact with him. He had been active in political circles in Indiana University and so on, and had some good political connections which were apparently enough to enable him to leap ahead of whatever credentials Phil Hauser was able to muster up. So, rather unexpectedly, we found we had a new figure.

Clemence: **Peel was a professor, but not a statistician; it was political science.**

Eckler: Yes, he was a professional man, and he knew quite a lot about political developments and so forth. I never got very close to Roy Peel; I think he felt more comfortable with some of his old friends. I recall that not so long after he came here, he was aiming to place a great deal of dependence on Bill Bennett. Bill Bennett was a younger man with whom he had been associated in one of the intelligence agencies. I've forgotten just which one it was. So he had contact with Bill Bennett, and he proposed to set up Bill Bennett as a kind of special assistant to him. He was to filter out all the information that Peel ought to know about each day. I, as Deputy Director, was expected to filter into Bill Bennett what I ought to let Peel know about.

Clemence: **That's a prescription for trouble, I guess.**

Eckler: I regarded it as a prescription for trouble. At any rate, I very quickly made signals that I did not feel that this was an acceptable arrangement. Fortunately, at that time the Department was quite supportive of my point of view, and I think they found reasons why Bill wasn't qualified for going into the post that was proposed. He was to be in an office between us, and the Department didn't support that, so it didn't work out. Bill stayed around for a time, I think, and there was never any animosity with Bill. He was a mild, quiet, and agreeable individual.

Clemence: **Was the Department basically supportive of the Bureau anyway at this point?**

Eckler: Yes.

Clemence: **Charles Sawyer, Secretary of Commerce, does that stand out for any reason?**

Eckler: Yes, we had relationships with him and he was a good, straightforward man. I always liked him. I had, with Mr. Sawyer and Roy Peel, a picture with President Truman, giving the figures from the 1950 census.

Clemence: **So Sawyer would listen to you as well as Peel?**

Eckler: I never had any direct contact with Sawyer on the Bennett idea. This came through the organizational channels, you know, classification and so on. So they decided that was not a good idea. Roy Peel had much more interest in public relations, foreign travel, and so forth. He felt that the Bureau had a story to tell, and he was ready to go ahead and try to tell it. He made a good presentation. He was a big, impressive fellow, very articulate, and I think undoubtedly he did do some building up of the prestige of the Bureau by his appearances.

Clemence: **Did he stimulate the international programs at all, or was that already on its way?**

Eckler: It was already going, I guess. I don't think he stimulated it appreciably or significantly, no. But if there was a chance to appear on some program where contacts with international people were involved, he would like to do that. So he had a lot of interesting public appearances.

Clemence: **You confirm what I've heard from other people that were senior in your period of time. When I asked about Roy Peel, most of them say they didn't know him as well as they might have because he traveled so much.**

Eckler: Yes, so his impact on the Bureau was not too great, I think. He left me a good deal of leeway with the executive staff, and I can't recall any particular issue on which we had important differences, except the Bill Bennett arrangement. We never discussed that between us either.

Clemence: **Was there ever any problem because of his political contacts, of trying to exert pressure to do favors for Members of Congress or Indiana officials?**

Eckler: There might have been some of that. I don't recall anything being very outstanding that way.

Clemence: **We never had many favors we could do anyway.**

Eckler: I don't recall his putting any pressure on, but there could have well been a case or two of that sort. He had a Supreme Court Justice swear him in, so he had contacts

with Indiana. Well, so much for Roy. Almost a complete change when Bob Burgess came along. I'd known Bob Burgess earlier; in fact my contacts with Bob went way back when I worked with the Harvard Economic Society in the 1920's. He was an expert on copper because he was at Western Electric, and they bought a great deal of copper for their work, their lines, and so forth. So, he was an expert on copper and used to talk to our business forecasting group about the prospects of copper prices as a commodity. He was a well-known statistician. I had contact with him at annual meetings of [the] American Statistical Association, and elsewhere, and regarded him as a good solid character. So I was pleased when it became apparent that he was going to be the Director.

Clemence: This was when?

Eckler: 1953, Eisenhower.

Clemence: He came from Western Electric.

Eckler: Yes.

Clemence: How do you suppose he got appointed?

Eckler: I understood that there was a man named Ralph Robey, who was quite an active statistician and public figure, and who was supposed to round up various suggestions for filling posts in the statistical agencies, and he was an old friend of Bob Burgess, and tossed his name in.

Clemence: You say this was somebody in the White House or somebody in the Bureau.

Eckler: No, neither one. He was a professional man in the New York area.

Clemence: I see, just asked to round up names.

Eckler: He was an expert; he knew a lot of people. He was asked to do that, to come up with suggestions, and I understand he brought up Bob Burgess' name, and that would not be primarily political. He was trying to find somebody to fill the job that had the qualifications. I guess Bob Burgess must have been a Republican, but he was not an active Republican in the sense of being known to the political powers.

Clemence: Didn't he also have a brother that got an important post?

Eckler: Yes, he had a brother, Randolph, who later became Assistant or Under Secretary of the Treasury. He was a very able fellow, and in many ways a better public figure than Bob. They were both able people.

Clemence: So, you think they came in independently rather than...

Eckler: Yes. Well, Burgess was a man who took everything about the job with extreme seriousness. He wanted to know, even on something like a routine letter, he wanted to get to the bottom of it and all it involved. He didn't want to sign anything on the basis that someone else had initialed it. He read it very carefully and asked questions, so it took time; however, I didn't resent that because I felt he had a right to be informed about what went on. On many issues that came up, we would have to spend time enough to brief him on the details, the background, and maybe pull people together. He would be very intelligent; he had good questions; and he tried to honestly carry out what was the best policy.

Clemence: Wasn't he fairly senior when he came in? Retired from Western Electric?

Eckler: Yes, I think well up in the sixties. He was in very good health, able to stand up to the racket very well.

Clemence: How did he handle the organizational side and personnel side? Did he let the Deputy pretty much run the store?

Eckler: Pretty much, yes. He didn't get into organization very much.

Clemence: He didn't want to move people around, promote some and demote others?

Eckler: No.

Clemence: He was there about 8 years, quite a long time to leave an organization unrearranged. One of the parts of the record for those years, which is sometimes cited as showing either that Burgess was not well informed or perhaps was getting too far along in years to remember well, was the Rickenbacher case. He was questioned by the judge himself about the value of the housing questions and apparently he got the same question four or five times before he came up with the answer the judge was waiting for. You probably remember his role in that, I guess it was 1961 or so, after he actually was out.

Eckler: He was a pretty senior character by that time.

Clemence: He was 73. Now, he was the first Director I actually saw firsthand; I came in 1959. I was very junior, so I had no reason to be in the Director's office. I remember seeing Dr. Burgess a time or two. He made quite an outstanding impression on the young statisticians, serious, as you said, diligent about his duties.

Eckler: He was not [a] trivial or careless fellow. He went into detail on everything, and he found it very hard to brush aside some things and say, "Well, I won't take any time on that." He went after everything.

Clemence: Was he able to see, though, when his key staff favored a choice of action and then go along with that, or did he really question everyone's judgment pretty thoroughly?

Eckler: He still questioned it. He wasn't swept away by consensus.

Clemence: Then we come to Richard Scammon.

Eckler: Well, that was again a complete change of pace. I told Dick on occasion that he was the best Director to work under that I had, and I meant that sincerely. Dick was very well wired in political matters. He was known to the Kennedys and other people as being an expert on election statistics, and he knew they were going to need that kind of service. So I think they felt that it would be desirable to have him somewhere in the Government so they could call on him and have access to his expertise.

Clemence: Let's pause there just a second. As far as the appointing itself, do you suppose Kennedy himself chose him to be Director or did he have somebody setting the buckets out, if you will?

Eckler: Well, he had direct contact with Kennedy before then, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he would have been, because he was a Democrat and he was knowledgeable on political matters. You would think that Kennedy might very well have made use of it directly. I'm not sure of that.

Clemence: Did you know Dick Scammon before he became Director?

Eckler: Yes I did. He was on two or three advisory committees for the Bureau. He was on the advisory committee on the content of the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* on Government statistics. He may have been on one or two other committees. That was about the limit of my contacts with him.

Clemence: Now why was he such a good Director to work under?

Eckler: Well, the reason he was such a good Director to work under, partly selfish on my part I suppose, he had complete confidence in the staff. He was willing to have us

make our decisions, and let him know if there was any trouble that came up. He said, “If you need the muscle on something, let me know. I’m here. Otherwise you go ahead and operate just the way you have been doing.” He didn’t try to get into the details of everything; he just kept a very broad brush contact. So this seemed to me to be good to have a Director who was familiar enough with the Bureau to know what it was all about, and come in at full steam when you had a question, but who didn’t try to use a lot of time for explanations on every point as you go along. That is what had happened with Burgess.

Clemence: Now, did Scammon represent the Bureau officially at hearings?

Eckler: Yes.

Clemence: So he stayed informed on major developments. Did he actually keep up with his other job during this time? I believe he had two offices.

Eckler: Yes, he had two offices, and he kept up his work on the compilation of election statistics, and the county volumes. He had a staff to carry that on. Every once in a while he’d be gone, and we’d get an explanation where he was—“I’m on my father’s business” was the explanation.

Clemence: Well, it is rather remarkable, almost unbelievable, that a man could be doing two such different jobs, on top of which he’s a valuable adviser politically to the administration, and not get the integrity of statistics messed up in some way.

Eckler: Scammon had an exceptionally brilliant mind and was the quickest man to pick up something that you would ever want to run into. He had enough statistical background to realize the importance of maintaining integrity; never any question in his mind about that. He grasped administrative problems very quickly. He was a fast learner, a very exceptional individual. Not many people could have done what he did.

Clemence: So, he really could keep separate in his mind all the different things he was interested in, and look out for the Bureau’s reputation—image?

Eckler: Yes, he would get calls from Members of Congress on occasion about what their district looked like and what to be expected and so forth, and he had colored charts for each congressional district, a great many. He would look at those colored charts, and he would begin to talk immediately with the Congressman about his own territory. He would say you got so and so here and so and so there, and he could talk with no lack of detail on any subject connected with the Congressman’s district. It was amazing how he would go into that.

Clemence: Quite remarkable. Now maybe we can come back to this later, but this might be a good time just to cover the final transition because it had been a long time before you became Director that anyone on the inside moved up to that, and how did you come to be Director rather than have another period as Deputy Director under another outsider. Did Mr. Scammon influence that?

Eckler: Mr. Scammon operated somewhat to influence that. Yes, he made representations that I had the knowledge and know-how and so forth to be a good appointment. And, at that time, Andy Brimmer was the Assistant Secretary of Economic Affairs, and Andy was supporting me very strongly. I don't know what influence he had, but he certainly had some. Then there were some others who wrote letters and so forth.

Clemence: This was 1964 or 1965.

Eckler: This was 1964. So there was a combination of influences. I didn't do any propagandizing for it or any particular work. I indicated I was willing to do it if it came, but I didn't get out there and work for it.

Clemence: Didn't you have some misgivings about taking a job that might run out in a few years, instead of going for another 16 years as Deputy?

Eckler: Yes, I might have to retire prematurely at 68! I was sure that I was beginning to run down, and it would give me plenty of scope to have another four years. Fortunately, at the end of that time, one of my old friends propositioned me about writing a book. He was developing a series of monographs for the Praeger Company, and he felt that there ought to be one on the Census Bureau, and I ought to do it. So, he also was from Hamilton College. You see, Hamilton College comes in at the beginning and end.

Clemence: We should note for the record here that the title of this book is no surprise; it's *The Bureau of the Census*. I might add that there are many copies of it at Bureau headquarters in Suitland, and it is often consulted as a very solid reference work on what the Census Bureau is all about.

Eckler: It has aged somewhat since it came out. But as history it still has some use.

Clemence: Well, we're really up now to the period that you were Director, 1965 to 1969. Before we go back to other subjects, we might just keep going briefly on the Directors, since you have stayed in the area and had some acquaintance with the Directors who came after you, beginning with George Brown [Director 1969-1973, Bureau of the Census]. You might want to reflect, of course, on the kind of leadership the Bureau's had since you retired.

Eckler: I hesitate to say a whole lot about that because I think conditions that George Brown faced and that others have faced are necessarily different from those that I faced. So, it is easy to be critical of what they did, but maybe if I'd been there I would have come closer to doing what they did. George was a remarkably tolerant man, I felt, when he came in. He expressed a good deal of support for me; there was no feeling of conflict or antagonism. He said he'd like to have me stay on for a while as consultant, and he would have me come to staff meetings, which I thought was quite a remarkable feature on his part, to have me sit in a staff meeting of a successor-Director. I naturally didn't throw my weight around very much, but it was quite interesting.

Clemence: You actually did that for a while?

Eckler: Yes, I did that for a while. He encouraged me to write up some phases of the Bureau's background that would be useful for him, and about that time I was getting into the possibility of writing a monograph on the Bureau for the Praeger Publishing Company. Ernest S. Griffith was the editor-in-chief of that series. So that some of the information background that I prepared for George Brown was also useful for the book later on. So, I was able to do quite a lot of work. I had a girl who was serving as an assistant on my typing and did a little research, and so forth. I thought it was quite a remarkable thing to have that kind of support from my successor. There was no doubt that it gave me quite a boost on getting my book started. George, I think, ran into some difficulties. He started off with the same staff and then he began to have...I think maybe the golden years of non-interference on the part of the Department came to an end, at least it seemed so to me. He had Joe Wright [Joseph R. Wright, Deputy Director, Bureau of the Census (1971-1972), Acting Director (January-March 1973)] who came into the Department, who took a lot of interest in the Bureau.

Clemence: **This was when they set up SESA (Social and Economic Statistics Administration)?**

Eckler: That came a little bit later, 1972. Joe was in there before that. They had various people established around the Bureau as sort of monitors of what they thought and did and so forth, and some of the professionals like Herman Miller [Herman P. Miller, Chief, Population Division (1966-1972)] were very resentful of this, because it seemed to reflect upon the independence and judgment that Bureau people had been using. Then, a little later, controversy developed as to the performance on the 1970 census tabulations, and Bob Drury, who had been my Deputy, got blamed for nonperformance in terms of time scheduling, but this is typical of census operations.

Clemence: **That was 1971.**

Eckler: Yes, this delay is typical of census operations, even if you make your best estimate. Bob Drury had made commitments in good faith and then couldn't live up to them. So, George Brown, I think, felt the hot breath of the Department on him to explain this, and he was very much embarrassed by it. Well, it may be he hadn't paved the way for this. He hadn't had the experience that this thing always happens, when results are over-promised. At any rate it seemed as though somebody's head had to roll. So poor Bob Drury got involved. He was a wonderful man and a very fine administrator. I felt it was a pity that he couldn't be continued.

Clemence: **One version of that story, and I don't say it's true, is that the commitments and promises involved when various States and governors would get tabulations for redistricting. And that whatever these commitments were, they seemed to favor the Democrat incumbents, and whether this was prejudicial or not, the Republicans found this offensive and were going to roll someone's head for playing politics with the Census.**

Eckler: Well, there may have been that explanation of it. I personally doubt that there was any of that that will hold water on analysis. You certainly can't have them all come out at the same time, and I can't imagine that Drury and his associates were deliberately trying to push the Democratic tabulations ahead of the others, but it might have looked that way.

Clemence: **From what you knew of Bob Drury personally, though, you wouldn't expect him to get into anything like that.**

Eckler: One of the squarest, most decent, law-abiding fellows I'd ever known. I would think that this was purely accidental.

Clemence: Well, this was a time when there was, although this was only the third year of the Nixon Administration, I think some of the people, at least at the staff levels in that Administration were already getting quite paranoid and suspicious about whether agencies were supporting them or working against them. Surely a most suspicious time for everybody. That didn't help George Brown either.

Eckler: Yes, that's why I say, I couldn't criticize George Brown for not giving support some way or other, as he faced problems that were pretty tough, and an Administration that was different from what we had before.

Clemence: Then you started to say a little bit later...

Eckler: A little bit later both Conrad Taeuber and Walt Ryan [Walter F. Ryan, Associate Director for Economic Fields (1968-1973), Bureau of the Census] retired. I remember that I was over there to the retirement ceremony, and I was asked to make a few remarks. I remarked that this is the first time on record that I knew of when two officials at that level had been retired at the same time. I thought it was an unusual coincidence. Everybody got the implication. Those were sad times, and we had people around there who, I think, were no bonanza for the Bureau.

Clemence: Well, you know Conrad Taeuber—who has to be about as gentle a soul, especially with other people—was really pinned down about this retirement by a *Fortune Magazine* interviewer, and I think as far as he would go was to say that it seemed to him that perhaps his views were not compatible with those in power. I don't think by any means all this was political; I think that period was full of hotshot managers who were going to reform everything and change everything. Anybody who had a few years of service was automatically suspect. I suspect both Ryan and Taeuber didn't look like the new style of managers.

Eckler: They didn't look like the new style at all, and Joe Wright and people associated with him wanted changes. Well, those were tough years.

Clemence: Then we got Barabba [Vincent P. Barabba, Director 1973-1976, 1979-1981, Bureau of the Census] in 1973.

Eckler: That was an interesting appointment. I had some contacts with Vince before he was appointed to see whether he should receive the approval of [the] American Statistical Association. I think there were very distinct question marks about approving him because he didn't have all the credentials. He had some experience, but not extensive statistical experience.

Clemence: I think the President of the American Statistical Association actually went on record against him—President Hildreth.

Eckler: Yes, he went on record against. We were all wrong; he was one of the finest Directors we ever had. Had a great ability, great deal of integrity, and flexibility—a real pleasure to work with. Later on, everybody regretted the early opposition of course. He became a vice president of the American Statistical Association and has been widely recognized, made a Fellow and so forth.

Clemence: He did well enough to be brought back again as Director after Plotkin.

Eckler: He made history of a sort by being brought back by the other Administration. That was a real exception. They felt they were in real trouble then.

Clemence: He left in 1976, and then the Carter Administration appointed Manuel Plotkin [Director 1977-1979, Bureau of the Census]. Did you know him at all before he was Director?

Eckler: No, I didn't know him before. I did know his boss, who was with Sears Roebuck. I never knew Manny. But, he was a good man; he just didn't have the flexibility and imagination to roll with political questions.

Clemence: Well, there was another trait there. Beginning with Barabba in 1973, I worked pretty closely with the Directors, and the Carter years were tough years too in a somewhat different way, sort of being aggressive and standing up to the challenges and misinformation. One of Manny's characteristics is never to attack his critics publicly. Now he just happens to believe that's very important, but it cost him in the job because some of the critics were very irresponsible, and he refrained from counterattack. He was interpreted as being weak or not able to cope with the situation. That was a bit of bad casting in that sense because they should have seen that the 1980 census was going to be fairly controversial in some ways. Then they brought Barabba back, and then we had Bruce Chapman [Director 1981-1983, Bureau of the Census] since then, under the Reagan Administration. Then he went over to the White House and joined the White House staff, and now we have Jack Keane [Director 1984 to 1988, Bureau of the Census] from Illinois. Bruce Chapman, I imagine, you didn't know at that time either. He was from the west coast.

Eckler: I met him when he came in, that's all. I've had no real contact with him since then, but my impression is very good of both Chapman and Keane. I feel that somehow or another the Bureau has been able to maintain a very high level of professional

competence in the senior staff, the Associate Directors, Deputy Director, I think it's a good team. It seems to be a good operation with [a] working spirit of cooperation.

Clemence: That is a good note to close with. Dr. Eckler, again, thank you very much.